

Feeding White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

We build and offer the one and only, [Hurley-Byrd Deer Feeder](#). It's one of our most popular series of feeders and for good reason. We love deer and finally there's a reasonably priced and extremely well crafted feeder made especially for your yard. Since it's such a popular feeder and we receive so many questions, I wish to spotlight The White-tailed Deer and offer some feeding tips.

White-tails are now the most wide spread deer in North America and it's directly due to its ability to adapt and survive. It's found from the least humanly populated regions of this continent to city parks teaming with our society's hustle and bustle.

Why, might you ask, is the reason there are so many white-tails? It's relatively simple. The White-tail has a tremendous ability to survive. It will eat nearly anything, when needed, has fabulous senses including the capability to spot small movements, its incredible hearing, and their sense of smell equals that of a Bloodhound. But, in my years of observation, it's the White-tails awesome athletic capabilities which allow it to escape dangers. It can go from zero to full speed faster than any sports car made today, can leap horizontally eight to ten body lengths and jump over twelve foot fences when required. White-tails are extremely tuned into their environment and if you've had the pleasure of watching a group of deer at your deer feeder, you've probably noticed they are always on guard. I call it their "Twitchy Nature" and I mean it. Watch for a while and you'll see them snap their heads or ears up, back, to the side in a constant effort to monitor their environment. At the first sign of any trouble, they are gone like a lightning bolt.

All of us love deer and many people enjoy attracting them to their yards but some don't know how to do it well or at all. We receive many requests in regard to deer feeding and tips to do so properly. To begin with, feeding deer is very simple. Their sense of smell will direct them right to your feeder. When other food sources are becoming scarce, they will follow the scent of good quality feed over long distances. Once they've found it, they will be more than happy to stay around as long as there's a fairly consistent supply.

There are various aspects of feeding deer that need to be addressed before setting out a feeder. First and foremost. Deer are beautiful creatures and look to be friendly, cuddly and approachable. This is very far from the fact of the matter. Deer can become aggressive, although rarely, for many reasons and we advise you keep your distance and do not approach them for any reason. If you find a wounded deer, or any wild or domestic animal, call your local wildlife control organization and do not approach the animal. Any wounded animal is potentially very dangerous.

In order to feed deer properly and safely, pick a location away from your home with a good viewing area. Do not set your feeder near a doorway or any other area that's frequented by people. If someone walks around a corner or through a doorway and comes face to face with a deer, that deer needs to make a decision.

It will go into one of two modes, flight or fight. It prefers to flee and usually does but if it feels it cannot, it might decide to fight. Keep your feeders away from any area where people may come into close contact.

With all that said, feeding deer is a wonderful hobby and one that can be done safely and enjoyably. Once you've picked a safe location for your feeder, it's time to feed. We highly recommend whole shelled corn (dried corn kernels that have been stripped from the cob as a whole seed) as the staple food. It's a high protein feed, readily available and is the least expensive to buy. Most importantly, it remains edible for many days under high moisture conditions. When you start looking for suitable deer feed, you'll find many types of deer feed on the market. Some are excellent and some are not. We're often asked about commercial deer chows. Deer Chow is a manufactured, pelletized product utilizing a mix of various feed types and may contain animal remnant by-products from slaughterhouses or the like. If these by-products are not processed correctly they may contain various diseases that can be introduced to the deer population through your feeding activity. Please do not use deer chows unless you are positive they are tested safe. Another issue with deer chow, and my personal dislike for them, is their inability to remain palatable to your wildlife once they've gathered moisture. Deer chow has no resistance to water and even humidity will render it worthless. Any rain, melting snow or the like will "puff" the chow into a mass of slop. Think of a bowl of bran type cereal. By the time you've reached the bottom of the bowl, the cereal is mush. This is deer chow when it gets wet and your deer WILL NOT eat it. You've now wasted money on an expensive product and it must be discarded. Whole shelled corn is by far a superior food type. The encased kernel of corn protects itself from moisture and will remain edible for many days, wet or dry. Some people use cracked corn in hopes of feeding their turkeys or other large birds such as Crows, Blue Jay and Cardinals. Cardinals love my own deer feeder and use it all day long. This is a great idea as long as the feed is consumed quickly, within a day or so. Since the kernel, or pericarp or outer shell of the seed, of corn is "cracked" open, it loses its capability to protect itself from moisture. When exposed to wetness, it too will absorb water and may not be eaten by your deer. Turkeys have no problem with it though and if you have a good population of turkey, they will love you too.

The MOST important rule of feeding deer is to offer one type of feed consistently. Deer are ruminants, like cows, and to properly digest their foods they develop a bacterium in their stomachs to start the process. Many unaware people start feeding their deer when the weather gets very cold or after other food sources are gone. This is a nice gesture but it takes many days for deer to produce the bacteria. Hence, your offering fills their bellies but they are getting little if any actual nutritional value. No matter when you start feeding, keep the same base food type available throughout the year or season. Once your deer have built up the appropriate bacteria, corn will become a premium food source. Its high levels of protein and complex sugars will do wonders in sustaining them through the hard months.

Why feed deer? Besides the obvious reasons of our own enjoyment, Doe Deer that receive good nutrition throughout winter will produce the healthiest fawns in late spring. Most Does carry two fawns and it takes a lot of energy to grow them in a healthy manner. One of the fun aspects of feeding deer through the winter months is they will more than likely bring their babies in late spring. Believe me, there is no better treat than watching a pair or groups of baby deer feeding and playing around your yard. It's one of my most awaited wildlife moments of the whole year. I guarantee it will become one of yours too. Pick out one of our [deer feeders](#) now and add a new level of wildlife feeding to your yard. If you have questions or comments, please write us at customer.service@hurleybyrd.com. We love wildlife and will help you feed them correctly now and for years to come.